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ABSTRACT

Writing teachers notice how students who succeed with their written projects often do so after they have moved to a kind of anger either with themselves or the project, with external stimuli, or with a general sense of injustice. They are stimulated by the emotion to creative problem solving, and as an effect, they may succeed at eliminating the perceived problem or injustice and overcoming the sense of injury. This type of expression of anger might lead to anti-social features in the writing--disrespect, unconventional language, threatening statements, manifestations of hate, severe sarcasm and contempt for the rights of others, and contempt for the status quo. Anger, however, can channel a writer's thoughts to creative problem solving with socially acceptable language choices in the writing. In all cases, a response to the emotion driving the written response seems called for, and writing instructors may need to understand and consider boundaries for their roles in each of these situations that reveal a rhetorical nature of anger. A survey of 28 teachers in the 1998 summer institute of the PA Writing Project elicited identification of anger as a constructive starting point in their own personal lives and as civically responsible individuals. Pro-active manifestations of anger relate to how learners solve problems they define, remove doubts they have identified, or pursue other types of inquiry related to active learning processes. (Contains 24 references.) (NKA)

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Writing Invention : Sometimes an Anti-Social Act, or the Relationship of Anger and the Impulse to Write

Panel C.3 Theorizing Emotion and Writing

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This paper presented in an earlier draft at the Conference of College Composition and Communication in Atlanta, Georgia on March 25, 1999 has been revised after the Columbine High School tragedy in Littleton, Colorado where outraged students had written about their anger in public places, such as in the school yearbook and in the educational environment. It reaffirms my original thesis that teachers and perhaps administrators, and more specifically, those who teach writing or integrate language arts into the curriculum at all levels of instruction, need to understand and respond appropriately to anger in its various manifestations. Anger as feminists have claimed is a healthy stimulus to creative thinking and pro-active problem solving; in its most negative manifestation, however, it can wreak havoc. Those who teach writing need to understand the rhetorical aspects of anger as potentially constructive or destructive invention processes. June 21, 1999

We, as instructors of writing notice how students who succeed with their written projects, often do so after they have moved to a kind of anger either with themselves or the project, with external stimuli, or with a general sense of injustice. They are stimulated by the emotion to creative problem solving, and as an effect, they may succeed at eliminating the perceived problem or injustice and overcoming the sense of injury. Other students, however, may become so consumed by their outrage or anger at a

perceived injury or injustice, that their problem solving abilities are limited by their overriding emotional responses, and their writing falters in one way or another. These falterings may be perceived as a kind of "writer's block," or one kind of manifestation or effect of what has been termed "writing apprehension," (Daly and Miller, 1975; Faigley, Daly, and Witte, 1981). They might experience a "flood of emotions" that works toward obfuscating meaning. Yet another kind of response to emotion may cause a kind of paralysis of action in writing; the writer becomes absorbed in ruminative thought. Unlike focused freewriting, daydreaming, engaging in stream of consciousness thought, letting an idea incubate for a period of time, Martin and Tesser identify another mode of thinking characterized by anticipation, regret, basking, worry, and emotionally charged current concerns. Rather than solving a problem, the writer engaged in rumination, may examine solutions, yet neglects to move toward a goal. Emotions fuel such ruminative thinking either precipitating a timely response, or for those who respond negatively to situations, instigating "out of flow" activity for writers, a kind of magnified emotional state that could include being angry.

Anger may surface in other ways in students' responses to assignments; they might write about anti-social solutions to situations, or they might privilege the unconventional. Often perceived negatively, this type of expression of anger might also lead to anti-social features in the

writing--disrespect, unconventional language, threatening statements, manfestations of hate, severe sarcasm and contempt for the rights of others, contempt for the status quo. Anger, however, can channel a writer's thoughts to creative problem solving with socially acceptable language choices in the writing In all cases, a response to the emotion driving the written response seems called for, and instructors of writing may need to understand and consider boundaries for their roles in each of these situations that reveal a rhetorical nature of anger.

Before understanding appropriate responses to manifestations of anger, it might be helpful for instructors of writing to understand the guise of this emotion. Gorkin in "The Four Faces of Anger" defines anger as a "state of heightened activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system ... that is fueled by our cognitive interpretations" (par. 3). In a more tangible understanding of anger, it can be understood as related to the four following situations:

1. As a response to an injustice, an abuse or threat to a "rule of conduct, a cherished belief or instrumental goal," in relation to self or a group or group member connected to self
2. As a response to an injury, a perceived psychological or physical act of disrespect, rejection, or disregard
3. As a response to invasion, when one's "identity and/or psychological integrity are being threatened," or one's

"freedom, autonomy, boundary and personal space are perceived to be constricted, disrupted or violated"

4. As an intentional response to perceived injustices, injuries and invasions, one is determined and resolved to "reflexively and/or purposefully...challenge the status quo" (Gorkin paragraph 3).

Anger in relation to the writer's purpose shapes the content and expression of the text and its form across the range of written discourse, as either imaginative, informative, argumentative or problem/solution, or variations or combinations of each. These choices relate to how the writer constructs himself/herself in relation to the audience of readers and the text that is to be constructed; this social relationship has been termed the "ethos" of the writer. It is a negotiated space that the writer imagines. It has been described in literature as a social-cognitive problem solving process (Flower 1994), and as the "felt sense" or affective domain related to the writing process (Brand 1991, Perl, 1980).

It has been argued that many students respond to what they are learning by acting in socially accepted ways with anger as one manifestation that the culture or its subcultures may expect. Gender, race, class and ethnicity shape writers' perceptions of who they are. Kenneth Gergen in The Saturated Self contends that emotions, including anger, are perhaps socially constructed or "cultural performances," a term that James

Averill coined; emotions are more like genres or stylistic responses. Gergen contends that "we are not driven by forces bottled up within us; rather we perform emotions much as we would act a part on the stage" (165). Emotional responses assumed by our student writers, the varying ethos that they construct, may be perceived as genres that they have internalized, or as extant culturally-recognized responses.

Anger as a manifestation of the writer's ethos across the range of possible behaviors or manifestations in texts can be either purposeful or spontaneous, constructive or destructive. Because of the complexity of the affective range of invention, should those who teach writing continue to de-emphasize the effects of emotions on the quality of written products, and on the states of writers before, during and after they have written their essays? How do we begin to understand types of destructive expressions of anger? What are some possible negative effects of these destructive expressions for different types of writers? What do some psychological studies reveal about expressions of anger that allegedly fuel the emotion rather than resolve the conflict or unease? If instructors see expressions of anger in students' essays, then how do instructors begin to understand the ranges to the expressed anger, and when necessary, secure assistance from support services?

Those that teach writing can at least acknowledge that student writers if and when they try to analyze why they are angry do not remain passive

to the situation as they communicate their memories, recommendations, responses to perceived injustices, positions toward injuries, their stories to an empathic audience of writing instructors (Fox, 1993; Heard, 1995; Moffett and Wagner,1992; Murray, 1994; Rico, 1983,1994; Wolpow and Askov, 1998). Gergen reminds us of the contemporary human condition in a postmodern world. He explains that the Cartesian belief, "Cogito ergo sum" has been replaced by "Communicamus ergo sum," situating communication, conversation, interaction, dialogue at the center of knowledge making (242).

Instructors that have situated written and spoken dialogue with students in response to students' anger accept the emotion as one of many starting points for expression. This position requires trust that the instructor will not abuse the rights of the student in this power relation. Also, based upon a belief that venting emotion initiates analysis and problem solving, the instructor who engages in dialogue with the student who has vented anger is committed to affect and emotion as shaping cognition or understanding. The instructor understands the impulse to write as coming "from within the writer as a result of the writer's perceptions of a particular situation" (Hillocks 85) Through the students' perceptual, conceptual or emotional sense of being wronged or the desire to solve a problem, the instructor understands the role of coach to assist the

the student writers who have been challenged enough to communicate their thoughts in writing.

Moffett and Wagner justify their emphasis on the affective range of expression to counteract what they describe as forms of anger in middle school and high school environments: "destructive rebellion, alienation from school, dropping out, and crime." They envision the classroom that allows for communication where voices are heard, "as a place where feelings and energy can be shaped and handled instead of a place where these forces must be stifled" (92). To situate the affective response of the writer alongside the conceptual, instructors of writing and teachers that incorporate language arts into their curriculum need to understand what Gorkin terms the four faces of anger, and they need to consider ethical behavior in response to the rhetoric of anger. Instructors as professionals need to exercise wisdom to deal effectively with each manifestation of this defamed emotion of anger, recognizing that each student has feelings. Also, as historians of emotion explain, there are collective emotional standards of society or a culture that we need to be aware of (Stearns and Lewis), and instructors of writing need to explore the rhetorical aspects of anger as an invention process.

There appears to be a distinction among terms for dealing with the affective range of the composing process; however, emotions refer to intense conditions where the person is stimulated or aroused to action for a

short period of time. These emotions can be positive or negative, such as grief, joy, fear, and anger. Writers can respond to these emotions through physical responses, such as fatigue, shortness of breath, redness of face, or they respond cognitively by thinking critically about the topic and their feelings about it, or they ruminate, or engage in a disruptive response. Attitudes have been distinguished from emotion; attitude is understood as the writer's long term responses to the emotion(s) and its effects. The attitude is a learned state. Some psychologists agree that emotion, too, is like a genre, a learned behavior, for it is a socially constructed response to a situation.

During the 50's in England, writers protesting vigorously against social injustice were termed "angry young men." Other descriptions of writers characterize them as experiencing "angst" understood as "dread, panic, anxiety." These associations with "anger" and "anguish" indicate connections or attitudes the culture shows toward aspects of the creative process. Studies about creative writers have shown the relationship of writers' feelings to written expression (Csikszentmihalyi, Stearns and Lewis,Wyer). Composition theorists like Brand and Perl try to show how emotional arousal affects a writer's intellectual processes. Activities to stimulate creative expression are echoed in the belief many expressivists or instructors of creative writing hold, that "Much powerful writing comes from anger" (Heard 66).

Instructors know if students are moved by their emotions to take control of their inquiry, often they communicate ideas with power, confidence and integrity. Given this freedom to voice an authentic response, students could represent various "incarnations" of anger as Tavris explains--either handsome or ugly, righteous, vindictive or dangerous. Paul Griffiths in What Emotions Really Are defines anger as a "disposition to all sorts of behaviors and mental state changes" (249). When students are encouraged to write in their authentic voice, a variety of possibilities is invited.

How can instructors of writing begin to understand the ethical principles for expressions of anger? "Polarity" as a philosphical concept Rico argues in "Push/Pull: Creative Tension" is "the father of creative tension... that literature, religion, art, and science have been obsessed with for centuries" (210). Anger or a kind of dissonance can shape how the writer thinks about a topic, influencing expressions of thoughts. Anger can be destructive when its "expression defensively projects and rigidly fortifies one's vulnerable identity and boundary by intending to threaten or violate another's integrity and appropriate boundary (whether the intention is conscious or not)" (Gorkin par. 5). It is this kind of expression that complicates the role of instructor, and confuses institutions about how to pro-actively respond. Nehring in Popular Music, Gender, and Post Modernism argues strongly that the analysis of the causes of emotion

should not be "a means to some therapeutic removal of ostensibly negative feelings" (xvii). The view to suppress anger, he contends, is wrongfully linked to a psychotherapeutic understanding that we need to "control and suppress anger" because "emotion [is] a physical force [that] overwhelm[s] reason" (111). Rather than suppress the anger, the writing instructor following this more feminist view and postmodern view of emotional expression could facilitate conversations with the student about dealing with the issue, and when the student persists with anger or does not move to resolution, the instructor needs to identify when to secure assistance from campus support services. It becomes clear that the tensions that emotions make visible create complicated roles for instructors. Those that might embrace all emotional responses perceive teaching as much more than transmission of knowledge and communication of what is known as factual information. Femininst philosophers have extended this belief of cognitivism in philosophy and social constructivism in psychology. Emotions contribute significantly to thought or reason, and in many instances, emotion is inseparably "a matter of the body and mind, of physical response and articulated judgment" (Behrings XVII).

Tavris in Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion explains the value of integrating anger into our processes, for she argues, "there is a one-to-one correspondence between feeling angry, and knowing why, because the 'knowing why' is a social convention that follows cultural rules" (20).

Often college writing instructors value tolerance for problem solving and for anger against social injustice, to a certain extent. Anger that moves others toward acceptance of solutions to irritating problems that affect those in the culture may be approved or sanctioned within the college context, yet society disavows other expressions of anger when they fall into unethical ranges, "for cold, premeditated revenge, for violence for profit, for hatred at injustice, for anger at arrogance" (78). The fear of stimulating this latter range of more aggressive or violent expressions, or disruptions to conventional mores continues to characterize our understandings of all types of anger.

Occasionally, students might be moved to the more aggressive expression of their anger, and their essays might assume an ugly, righteous, vindictive tone. These manifestations of anger represent another approach to anger for thinking about a topic and then expressing it, which is less socially sanctioned by the culture of an institution. The effects of expression of these types of anger, however, ought to stimulate discussions among those of us that teach writing. How do students discover ideas about topics related to social issues or memories that initiate their emotional responses, including anger? While many of us may feel comfortable talking to our students about their writing, including their use of language, information, and details that might fit hostile or aggressive responses, we

need to identify ethical communication processes and acknowledge the need for psychological support services in certain cases.

In Invention as a Social Act, LeFevre argues that invention has been a "socially influenced" and a "socially constituted" process. The expression of the writer's ideas through the "ethos" that the writer constructs "appears in that socially created space, in the 'between,' the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener or reader" (46). She proposes a continuum of social perspectives on invention that reveals the degree of social interaction of the writer with "others" showing internal dialogues, collaborative processes, and collective understandings. Where does the anti-social or less sanctioned manifestation of anger fit into this scheme of the invention processes for an individual writer or a group of writers collectively or individually outraged or vilified? How can we begin to understand anger in its varying degrees as one of the impulses for writers to begin their inquiry, especially when anger is perceived as one of what Alison Jaggar terms the "outlaw emotions"? The singular view of anger in its extreme manifestations suppresses rhetorical understandings of this emotion in relation to creativity and inventive ways of thinking about topics.

Instructors of writing would acknowledge that sometimes the student writer's thoughts are written one way as a journal entry, yet these similar thoughts may be constructed another way for a real audience of

readers in a more socially acceptable or recognizable genre. The anger in less formal writing becomes a vehicle for initiating dialogue, dialectical reasoning, polarity, serving as a catalyst for solving problems on the personal or social level. Results from several studies about anger and its expression begin to reveal conflicting information, however, about the effects of venting anger. Venting may be a powerful activity, in and of itself, as long as it follows ethical boundaries; venting anger, and more importantly, moving to a cognitive understanding of it, or facilitating resolution of conflict seems to be more desirable for its constructive outcomes. Communication seems essential to effect cognitive growth, and effective feedback is essential for facilitating instruction. Tavris overviews the results of one psychological study that shows a negative effect about communicating anger. She explains the confounding effect of anger fueling unresolved anger: "When people have been denigrated and criticized, giving them the opportunity to express their resentment generally makes them angrier" (141). She does not consider the complexity of getting people beyond the humiliation of offense--the time and effort required. Because of conflicting information about the effects of expressing anger, it is easy for the composition instructor to misunderstand, perhaps even misapply, or even ignore the writer's anger, and even worse, to abandon opportunities to constructively work with it due to the limitations imposed by time.

Nehring in Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism explains how an "outlaw emotion," such as anger, for many people precedes social criticism. These partially formed feelings provide "the first indication that something is wrong." The discovery that cynical acquiescence is not the only possible way to react to the perceived problem might even "provide a new ray of hope" (123). The product of this creative act has transformative possibilities that compositionists have written about in other terms (Hillocks, 1995; Flower, 1994, Moffett and Wagner, 1992; Murray, 1994).

Recently historians of emotion have come to question how certain emotions like anger have come to be [mis]understood as increasingly infantile and unacceptable (Stearns and Lewis 5). Standards for emotions are constructed in terms of the actual incidence and intensity. In other words, anger as one such emotion is defined by the culture and its norms for it.

Tavris provides an encompassing definition of anger as a process or as a transaction, more constructively, "a way of communicating." She excludes from this discussion the kind of anger that is caused by organic abnormalities, and supports the view that angry episodes are "social events" about which our "beliefs...and the interpretations we give to the experience, are as important to its understanding as anything intrinsic to

the emotion itself" (19). This view about emotions is reflected in the work of other psychologists (Gergen 1991; Griffiths 1997).

In composition studies, we have begun to understand the social aspects of discovering ideas for intended audiences. LeFevre in Invention as a Social Act identifies the social relationships of the writer to the audience, of the writer engaging in a dialectical tension with the socio-culture to generate new ideas. She explains that dialectical thinking plays a part in types of intellectual discovery, even creative thinking. Other types of oppositional thinking have been identified as contributing toward meaning making. The relationship of the writer is processed in relation to others for inventive thinking processes to occur.

Occasionally, students motivated by their initial anger are prevented from getting beyond the flood of emotion to see how a problem can be resolved constructively through the process of writing. Or the institutional contexts might perceive anger as an anti-social emotion contributing to irrational or unreasonable behavior in response to experience. These students repress part of themselves in such situations. Yet another view of emotions and writing contributes to this understanding of a type of angered response as a manifestation of a mood or personality disorder, "oppositional defiant disorder" (Wilson, Nathan, O'Leary, and Clark 455). Manifestations of this type of anger fit patterns of "negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior lasting at least six months" in which at least four or more

of the following criteria are present: loses temper, argues with adults, defies requests or rules, deliberately annoys others, blames others for their own mistakes, becomes easily annoyed by others, and appears spiteful and vindictive. This anger causes malfunctioning in social, academic and occupational functions. It is important for instructors of writing to seek the assistance of support services when a student writer indicates a variety of these patterns of behavior over a period of time. While instructors might feel competent in dealing with all situations, it once again might be preferable to acknowledge situations that move beyond the roles of ethical teaching practices and responsibilities.

Each of these understandings of anger reveals what this complicated emotion is in various situations. Griffiths in What Emotions Really Are supports a view of a complex reading of anger. Those who experience anger either assume an expected role of the angered individual, show their anger in a variety of predictable physiological ways, or begin to conceptualize how to respond to their sense of injustice, injury, or invasion through intentional plans. For each category, the type of anger, while called the same emotion, varies greatly. Each varying expression of anger that Griffiths explains needs to be understood for its problem solving, creative, expressive, and therapeutic values. Our culture persists in upholding a one-sided, negative image of anger rather than carefully examining its four dimensions as purposeful, spontaneous, constructive,

and destructive. Expressions of each through assertion, hostility, passion, and rage would assist instructors of writing in understanding broad and nuanced emotional-behavioral responses of anger as they manifest themselves in student writing.

From my experience as a teacher of writing, I have noticed the range of anger in writing, and I am beginning to understand a rhetoric of anger that includes language of assertion, hostility, passion, or rage in response to students' perceptions of injustice, injury or invasion. I have surveyed 28 teachers in the the Summer 1998 Institute of the PA Writing Project who have identified anger as a constructive starting point in their own personal lives and as civically-responsible individuals I have begun to wonder why anger in its constructive forms does not get labeled as such, "anger," but instead, seems to be denied or suppressed by being labeled "problem solving," "conflict resolution," or "creative thinking." These pro-active manifestations of anger relate to how learners solve problems they define, remove doubts they have identified, or pursue other types of inquiry related to active learning processes. Yet anger continues to connote aggressiveness, intolerance, defiance, abrasiveness, even hostility, and violence.

Anger as a response to the existing environment might constitute creative solutions to otherwise troublesome situations. How do we define

this anger in composition studies, and when does anger move from an area of creative inquiry, a state of emotive stimulation that precedes higher cognitive thinking for student writers rather than a persistent, problematic oppositional behavior? Tavris asserts that emotions originate in social relations which would include areas of conflict that ought to be examined.

If anger could be understood as more complicated than a shameful negative response to a situation or the environment, then composition instructors might begin to better understand how this emotion figures into invention processes for many writers (Fox, Murray, Wolpow and Askov).

Through this presentation I have attempted to identify a range to anger that writers often engage in to facilitate a flow experience, the environment conducive to creative, effective critical thinking and expression in writing, and yet another kind of expression more disturbing and perhaps disruptive that initiates dialogue that effects feedback processes. If "Communicamus ergo sum" typifies our postmodern condition, then it is important for those who teach writing to understand the full range of the rhetoric of anger to identify boundaries of our professional roles and responsibilities.

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